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Religion, Nationhood and Anglo-Scottish relations 1603-1714

Will you the Tweed that sullen boulder call.
 Of soil, of wit, of manners, and of all?
 Why draw you not, as well, the thrifty line
 From Thames, Trent, Humber, or at least the Tyne?

...

What ethic river is this wondrous Tweed,
 Whose one bank virtue, t'other vice, does breed?

Andrew Marvell's eulogy to *The Loyal Scot* emerged from the printing press in 1669. Its immediate subject was Captain Archibald Douglas, a naval officer killed on his vessel at Chatham, during the Dutch raid on the Medway in the recent conflict between the Stuart Crown and the United Provinces. An equally suggestive context was provided by a project being pursued simultaneously at the court of Charles II. Between 1668 and 1670, Privy Councillors from both sides of the border tried – and failed – to secure mutually acceptable terms for a legal and parliamentary union between England and Scotland: two kingdoms that had shared same monarch since 1603, but which remained otherwise separate polities. Marvell wrote in warm support of the principle of closer union. In his verse, the death of a Scotsman in arms, fighting for the same monarch and the same national interest, dramatized the irrational and self-destructive folly of continuing segregation and animosity between two countries that had, he believed, in reality become deeply co-dependent.

Marvell yearned for a time when there would be 'no more discourse of Scotch or English race'. The idea prompted him towards an extended meditation on the nature and limits of national identity, on the arbitrary character of the political boundaries that divided up the world, and the moral dangers of grounding conceptions of vice and virtue upon an accident of geography. 'Nation is all, but name, a Shibboleth/ Where a mistaken accent causes death', he mused: 'In Paradise names only nature showed/ At Babel names from pride and discord flowed'. The poet was in no doubt as to the particular source of disharmony between the Stuart kingdoms, and the most severe obstacle towards their rapprochement.

But who considers right, will find indeed,
 'Tis Holy Island parts us, not the Tweed.

...

Though kingdoms join, yet church will kirk oppose;
 The mitre still divides, the crown does close...

Marvell linked the continuing antagonisms between English and Scottish subjects to confessional conflict; specifically, the tensions between the Church of England and the Presbyterian persuasion dominant in much of Lowland Scotland. He identified the most baleful agents of division as the English

bishops, whose attempts to impose the episcopalian structure on Scotland had provoked a stream of rebellions, eliciting crushing military responses from the Crown and a widespread English perception of the northern kingdom as a nestbed of fanaticism and sedition. 'What the ocean binds is by the bishops rent', Marvell lamented, 'then seas make islands in our continent'.

Yet in levelling this charge, Marvell was being less than candid about his own position. As a figure with pronounced sympathy for Protestant Nonconformity and attachment to the older Puritan inheritance, the poet was a bitter opponent of the power of bishops within England, as much as in Scotland. His attitudes spoke to a larger tendency within English politics. For almost thirty years, since the eve of the Civil War, militant and radical English Protestants had co-opted and appropriated Scottish grievances. Repeatedly, they had sought to capitalise on pressure from the north to undermine their Anglican adversaries in England, and so pave the way for radical changes within the structure of the Church in their own kingdom.

The Loyal Scot therefore offers us a sharp insight into the complex and abrasive relationship between religion and nationality in seventeenth-century Britain. Powerful lines in modern historiography, focused primarily on the eighteenth century, have represented Protestantism as part of the building blocks towards the creation of a British state, and, indeed, of British national identity itself. In the century before the Act of Union, however, Protestantism tended overwhelmingly to divide rather than unite. The conflicts between English and Scottish congregations, Anglicans and Presbyterians, cast light upon historic fractures at the heart of the European Reformation, which made the notion of a unified Britain appear untenable on theological as well as political grounds. But, as Marvell's works illustrate, the religious divisions *within* England and Scotland could be just as important as those that cut between them. Those internal faultlines gave rise to cross-border affinities, and brought about the creation of new political communities, as groups in both kingdoms sought allies to bolster their position against more immediate antagonists. In understanding how some commentators could begin to consider themselves British, it is equally important to look *outside* the British Isles. After 1689, the wars against France and the settlement of the royal succession on the House of Hanover challenged the provincialism lamented by Marvell, and stirred up new perceptions of what it meant to be an English or Scottish Protestant. This paper will show how ideological pressures local and international all came to play a vital role in the passing and securing of the Act of Union in 1707.

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Protestantism was identified as early as the 1540s as a potential force of unity within the British Isles. There was an obvious logic behind the idea. England and Scotland both experienced the upheavals of Reformation in the sixteenth century, with repercussions for the domestic and foreign policies of the two kingdoms. Moreover, these changes proceeded at a time when uncertainty over the future of the Tudor dynasty had raised up a host of Scottish candidates for the English throne - religious commonality came together with the increasingly likely prospect of dynastic union. In this context, much of the language and imagery of Early Modern 'Britishness' was drawn out of the circulation of religious texts across the border, with English and Scottish Protestants identifying an interest in protecting and supporting each other's communities. The poet James Henrisoun published an *Exhortacion* to his fellow Scots to *Conforme themselves to the Honorable, Expedient & Godly Union between the Realmes* in 1547. 'Give eare... O Britaine (for of that name both rejoyseth), whiles the Lord calleth, exhortheth, an admonisheth', urged the English preacher Anthony Gilby in 1558. For these authors the termination of centuries of hostility by spiritual concord became a moment of apocalyptic

significance – the birth of an elect nation, offering sanctuary behind its sea-walls to the embattled followers of true religion. In 1603, this dream appeared to inch one step closer, when James VI of Scotland took his seat upon the English throne, with a resolution to deliver a ‘perfect union, a blessed union... the Reuniting of these two mightie, famous and ancient Kingdomes of England and Scotland, under one Imperiall Crowne’.

These hopes, however, failed to materialise. If the politics of the later sixteenth century had raised up an idea of British Protestant union, the subsequent hundred years of Stuart rule very nearly dashed it. Many of the resulting problems were written into the terms and conditions of the sharply contrasting Reformations experienced north and south of the border before 1603. England’s pathway to Protestantism represented the ultimate ‘magisterial Reformation’ – a process led and contained by the Crown and centred on the annexation of spiritual and ecclesiastical authority by English monarchs. The English Reformation left the hierarchical, episcopal structures of the Church intact; its liturgy blended theological commitments to the reformed religion with many vestiges of older Christian practices (a ‘mingle mangle’, according to the Elizabethan Privy Councillor William Cecil). Scotland’s Reformation was sealed later in the sixteenth century, but it brought a more comprehensive transformation of the Church; a recasting of doctrine, structure and ritualistic practice taken directly from the Calvinist hothouses of the continental Europe. The Protestant reinvention of Scotland was secured by the aristocratic rebellion that overthrew Mary, Queen of Scots, in homage to the Calvinist doctrine of the right to resist ungodly monarchs. While bishops were not eradicated in Scotland, their power was winnowed down, as zealous clergymen pressured the Crown towards adoption of a Presbyterian structure of church government.

James VI and I therefore inherited two very different church establishments, with different expectations and understandings of the proper role of a Protestant monarch. Through the century that followed, this disjuncture became one of the driving sources of instability across the British Isles, as Stuart princes ensconced themselves within their southern kingdom, and became physically and politically distant from Protestant opinion in Scotland. King James, having failed to bring about legal and parliamentary union, turned to church affairs as an alternative route towards Anglo-Scottish convergence, introducing the Five Articles of Perth in 1618 as an attempt to harmonise liturgical practises, mainly by integrating elements of English ceremony into the Kirk. This policy unleashed a firestorm of Calvinist protest, in which, as one recent historian has put it, the matter of whether ‘to kneel or not to kneel’ at Holy Communion became ‘the defining question for a generation of Scottish worshippers’. Twenty years later, the imposition of the Book of Common Prayer provoked the publication of the National Covenant – a defiant affirmation of Scotland’s separate religious identity, and the rallying point for rebellion against James’s son Charles I. The Covenanting revolt famously created the seedbed for Civil War in England, principally by forcing Charles to call a parliament at Westminster. As factions mobilised for and against the king in the south, the appeal to anti-Scottish feeling was a central component in the political literature of England’s emergent Royalist party.

As Andrew Marvell bemoaned in 1669, confessional division provided new material for old prejudices. Broad­sides against the ‘popish’ Church of England or ‘fanaticke’ Scots were worked into the vocabulary of a casual, commonplace and highly persistent mutual xenophobia. The Presbyterian leadership in Scotland swung towards the Stuarts in the later phases of Civil War, opposing the execution of Charles I and the declaration of the republic in 1649. Yet after the Restoration, the old animosities were revived, and through the reign of Charles II, continued attempts to Anglicise the Church of Scotland further radicalised the Presbyterian opposition. In the Revolution of 1688-9, Presbyterians took advantage of the power vacuum created by the flight of James II to seize control

of Scotland's parliamentary institutions, and remodel the Kirk in their own image, driving bishops permanently out of the Church establishment, and making clear that church government was a matter primarily for the Estates of the kingdom, more than for a monarch residing in England. 'Adieu any temper of moderation, adieu union', lamented the earl of Tweeddale, the Edinburgh Privy Councillor who managed the transition of power, 'as these men are mor violent then those who went before, soe will be ther government...' Only eighteen years short of the Act of Union, the dominant parliamentary factions in England and Scotland had never appeared so ideologically far apart.

The possibility of the kingdoms converging under a common British identity was challenged not just by the particularism of Protestants in England and Scotland, but by their more cosmopolitan affiliations. Many strands of Early Modern Protestantism maintained transnational interests and identities. But this consciousness encouraged worshippers in England and Scotland to look beyond rather than across the rest of the British Isles. In English sermons and treatises, commitments to a greater Protestant cause meant identification with French Huguenots, Vaudois and Palatinate Calvinists and, until the 1650s, at least, the Dutch. Scotland's international affinities extended especially into Northern Europe: embodied in the lives and careers of 60,000 soldiers who ventured overseas in the Thirty Years' War, to fight principally in Danish and Swedish armies. Politically, Anglo-Scottish links mattered no more, and usually less, than this larger panoply of allegiances. Many Protestants would be more familiar with the state of the front line in continental Europe than with affairs across the border in their own island. Robert Harley, the English secretary of state who managed the 1707 Treaty of Union was perhaps exaggerating only slightly when he confessed to knowing 'no more of Scotch business than of Jappan'.

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Doctrinal divides, endemic xenophobia and the alternative centre of gravity provided by continental Europe all show why the grander Britannic visions enunciated by James VI failed to come to fruition. It is not difficult, therefore, to see why much of modern historiography perceives the Union settlement of 1707 as an overwhelmingly top-down process, imposed through bribery and intimidation, in the teeth of unremitting Scottish opposition. Yet the rest of this paper will argue that such a picture is incomplete. In spite of all the obstacles, I will suggest that there was space in English and Scottish politics for unionist feeling – for acquiescence if not outright promotion of the Act of Union, even if it was posited simply as the least alarming step among an array of bad options. The two crucial factors were, firstly, the divides *within* England and Scotland, hinted at in Marvell's *Loyal Scot*, and secondly the pull of Protestant internationalism. For some Scottish commentators in the early eighteenth century, Union could be a necessary if imperfect instrument to assist the defence of 'true religion' across Europe, at a time of renewed uncertainty over the future of the Reformation.

Protestants in England and Scotland might not have recognised themselves as belonging to one common British nation, but politically informed subjects did accept that they were part of a shared *polity*. One of the main reasons why a composite monarchy such as Stuart Britain challenged its rulers was the capacity for dissidents in one kingdom to strengthen their position by cultivating allies in another: allowing networks to form across borders in opposition to Crown policy. We can see this dynamic at play in the early 1640s. While the Covenanting rebellion against Charles I danced to a tune of militant patriotism, its leaders rapidly began to associate themselves with Puritan opponents of Charles I in the Westminster Parliament and sought closer co-ordination in the interests of securing concessions from the Crown. 'Your grievances are ours, the preservation of religion and liberties is common to both nations. We stand or fall together', proclaimed a Scottish propaganda pamphlet

distributed in London and Essex. By 1641, the Covenanters had wedded themselves to a fully Britannic manifesto, proposing a Presbyterian settlement not merely for Scotland but in England. The 'Root and Branch' bill lodged in Westminster, which aimed to abolish the office of bishop within the Church of England, appeared in its initial form as a Scottish negotiating demand put before Charles I.

Presbyterian rebels relied upon support from England because they were painfully aware of their own fragility closer to home. Counter-revolutionary pressures had emerged in Scotland with increasing intensity from the early 1640s, and with several notable defections from the Covenanting cause to the Crown, the rebel force was less robust than its published claims and pretensions suggested. Covenanting leaders required a victory for the English parliamentarians in order to secure and uphold their own position within Scotland – ideally by instituting a parallel process of church reform south of the border. Accordingly, Scottish regiments moved south to take up arms for the English Parliament, playing a critical role in the defeat of the king's forces at Marston Moor. In 1650, Covenanters made their backing for Charles II against Oliver Cromwell conditional on the creation of Presbyterian establishments in both the northern and southern kingdoms, in the event of a Restoration. On this foundation, the marquis of Argyll, leader of the *devot* faction in Scottish politics, crowned Charles II in Edinburgh, as king, not of Scotland, but of 'Great Britain'. The Stuart push for church uniformity across the British Isles was being challenged, not by a vision of Scottish Protestantism separatism, but by *British* Presbyterianism.

The experience of the 1640s showed how calls for closer Anglo-Scottish unity could emerge, not out of an organic sense of British identity, but as a product of the political pressures unleashed within an unstable composite monarchy. The same dynamic explains why a swathe of Scottish Presbyterians were able to acquiesce and ultimately rally behind the Act of Union after 1707, for all the animosity and suspicion that it provoked within their ranks. The scale of Presbyterian suspicion towards Union is not in doubt. In sermons, pamphlets and public addresses, ministers of the Kirk vented their fears that the new British parliament (with bishops seated in the House of Lords) would undermine and ultimately destroy the new church settlement established in Scotland after the 1688 Revolution. Union, prophesied one clergyman in 1703, would prove 'an Inginge for subjecting us to an English Court' and 'bring[ing] back Prelacy'. Officially, Presbyterians had won the concession they needed – the Articles of Union made clear that the Kirk would remain unaltered from the 1689 settlement. For many ministers, however, the strength of the pledge was highly uncertain. The dangers were aptly confirmed in 1712 when the Westminster Parliament passed a new Toleration Act, safeguarding the religious liberties of Scotland's declining but still significant Episcopalian minority.

Yet if Union was a distinctly unappetising prospect for the Presbyterian clergy, they searched in vain for a viable alternative. With the Crown and the Councils of England and Scotland fully signed up to the plan, the most visible opposition came from the Jacobite court in exile, which was beginning to toy with an appeal to wounded Scottish national feeling, in its bid to recapture the throne for the heirs of James II. In their pamphlets and covert communications, supporters of the exiled Stuarts attempted to cultivate Presbyterian opinion. But against the political legacy stemming from the previous century, any such alliance was at best a remote possibility. The overwhelming likelihood, as most Scottish commentators deduced, was that a second Stuart restoration would bring back Episcopalian bishops (as in 1660), and the unravelling of the cherished Kirk settlement of 1689. The more that anti-union feeling became associated with the Jacobite cause, the less congenial it became to Presbyterians. Or, as William Carstares, the clergyman and principal of Edinburgh University conceded, 'the desire I have to see our Church secured makes me in love with the Union as the most probable means to preserve it'.

There were other ways in which proponents of Union could appeal to the conflicted Presbyterian conscience. The immediate goal of the Act of Union was to unite Great Britain behind the passing of the throne to the Hanoverian dynasty, on the principle of a 'Protestant succession'. The death of Queen Anne in 1714 brought about the coronation of George I - a Lutheran prince less obviously wedded to the Church of England than most of his predecessors. The Hanoverian succession brought the matter of the British throne onto the battlefields of Europe, where the main source of support for the Jacobites came from Louis XIV's France. It also put a new complexion on the Act of Union.

Since 1689, the continental wars fought between France and the Grand Alliance, and the vast commitments imposed upon England and Scotland, had been legitimised with appeals to Protestant solidarity - the need for worshippers to stifle their divisions and coalesce at a time when 'the whole Christian Church' is 'attacque'd by the common enemy' in the words of one English clergyman. The Union, by locking out the Jacobites and paving the way for the Hanoverian succession, could now be captured as part of the same struggle. 'The storm that hath seem'd to threaten Brittain of a great many years is not yet blown over...' warned the moderate Presbyterian earl of Melville. 'The designs & power of the Romish party in Europe' still worked towards 'the suppressing & exterminating of the Protestants'. In the face of this peril, he argued, it was incumbent on English and Scottish Protestants to 'lay side Jealousy, enmity and prejudice', in the interests of a greater cause. Whether they liked it or not, 'Scotland & England ... cannot be separate by a sufficient barrier; the Sea cannot be made to run betwixt them, Hadrian and Severus walls cannot be easily built'. Far from continuing with futile pretences of separation, there was an irresistible logic pointing towards the union of 'two Nations who dwell in the same Islands... who are of the same language, of the same profession of Religion', and shared the same interest in Europe.

Acting on this opinion, a small but growing number of Presbyterian leaders began to break ranks and consider the opportunities as much as the demerits of Union. As Carstairs, Melville and other like-minded voices recognised, the political space had narrowed. When the only viable alternative to united Hanoverian Britain was a separate, Jacobite and Episcopalian Scotland, a case could be made for choosing the protection of the Presbyterian Kirk and the Protestant succession over the sovereignty of the Edinburgh Parliament. This sentiment influenced the passing of the Act of Union, and shaped the settlement that resulted from it. Great Britain was founded as a bi-confessional state, containing two Established Churches: a broadly Protestant polity that chose its monarchs on religious grounds. This new nation experienced its first major political test as early as 1715, when the Jacobite challenge arrived on British shores, and rebel forces mustered in Scotland on a mandate to overthrow the settlements of 1689 and 1707. To the relief of the king's ministers, the clergy of the Kirk - including many who had opposed the Act of 1707 - rallied in defence of the *status quo*. The Presbyterian case for loyalty, Union and the Hanoverian succession was articulated for the first time in sermons, civic ceremonies and printed pamphlets, exhorting the flock to fight for George I and presenting the united Protestant Britain as a new Israel, putting its Assyrian tormentors to the sword.

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For shame! extirpate from each loyal breast
That senseless rancour, against interest.
One king, one faith, one language, and one isle,

English and Scotch, 'tis all but cross and pile.

Andrew Marvell's appeal to his compatriots represented a minority sentiment in 1669, and there were few indications that it had garnered any greater acceptance in 1707. Protestantism in particular had not proved to be the cohesive force imagined in sixteenth-century blueprints – for much of the seventeenth century, religious identities served not merely to slow the pace of Anglo-Scottish convergence, but actively to impede it. Yet for all the sparks that flew between Church and Kirk, it remains a startling paradox that Scotland's Presbyterian ministry – for so long the mouthpiece for ideas of godly separatism - reinvented itself in 1715 as a dedicated champion of the kingdom of Great Britain.

This change was, in part, the result of alterations over the seventeenth century, flowing from the dynastic union of 1603. The creation of a composite monarchy meant that there was a greater scale of interaction between English and Scottish subjects than at most prior points in their history. Many of the same political challenges, problems and possibilities were shared on either side of the border - a British *experience* emerging even when there was no meaningful British identity. Just as importantly, the political and religious controversies aroused under Stuart rule never neatly set one kingdom against each other, but, rather, created fractures and faultlines in every part of the monarchy. If very few people felt British, there were nonetheless communities in England and Scotland that believed themselves to be safer under Union than if left entirely at the hands of their fellow countrymen. If the divisions between England and Scotland had prevented the creation of Great Britain, as imagined by James VI and I, in 1603, the divisions *within* England, and Scotland made it possible a century later.

To understand how some Scottish and English subjects could come to consider themselves 'British', we have, finally, to acknowledge the fluidity and porosity of national identity in Early Modern Europe – the difference between the age of the modern nation state, and that of the pre-modern dynastic state, when nationality was only one of many influences over personal identity. National identity in Early Modern England and Scotland was a vivid and lively force, but the political implications of nationhood were contestable, and its relationship with *confessional* identity was unsettled. After 1707, Scotland's Presbyterians concluded that protecting the nation's godly inheritance came before the preservation of its sovereign political institutions. For many clergymen, Union became defensible as a form of service to the greater international Protestant cause - a wider field of ideas and allegiances that transcended particular nations and their churches. Presbyterian leaders could lend their backing to the Union settlement, less as a desirable outcome in itself than as a *means* to an end, to be judged by its ability to advance and protect the cause of true religion. The struggle to define and settle the meaning of 'Britishness', would echo through Scottish and English politics long into the century that followed.